

Movie Makers

January-February, 2000

Volume 10 No. 1

The American Motion Picture Society

Tackling a Big Production on A Small Budget

by David Cockley

Most amateur video and film makers dream of stepping into the shoes of Stephen Spielberg or Martin Scorsese to produce and direct a big-budget major movie, chock full of outstanding actors, hundreds of extras and lots of glitz special effects. We're all convinced that we have the necessary talent, and only a lack of money...say, to the tune of fifty million dollars or so...is holding us back from achieving our dream of producing a blockbuster hit movie.

While I haven't found an easy answer to the problem of raising several million dollars to fund a movie, I have developed a process for producing an ambitious amateur program. I'm an amateur writer/producer/director, and to my delight I've discovered several other talented amateurs who



also enjoy the movie-making process. This team includes Dave Ireland and Bill Bundy, two talented amateur videographers, Susan Weber and Jim Amenhauer, two members of the Cleveland Songwriters Circle who write original songs and lyr-

ics, and Jeff Collins, an amateur composer who performs the synthesized accompaniments for the songs and custom post scored music for the scenes. Other key team members are Mark Ireland and Bob Myers, who record the songs, Diane Dudek, the mother of a former cast member who is the music director, Kathy Nejman, who choreographs the dance routines, and Drue Murman, the mother of two cast members who manages costumes and props as well as assisting with the choreography.

I have always enjoyed musical comedies—on stage and in the movie theater—and I enjoy working with children, so needless to say, most of my productions are musical comedies for young audiences. This last year I produced a half-hour musical comedy for young audiences entitled *ALIENS IN THE ATTIC*, which was fortunate enough to win Best Story Award in

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Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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George W. Cushman
Founder
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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From the Editor



Happy New Year!

My year got off to a great start. My most recent documentary, "The Passing of Time," placed third in the documentary category of the latest Broadcast Education Association juried faculty competition. This competition is the "Academy Awards" for broadcast professors. It is not my intent to gloat over the win. I also entered this piece in the Slamdance Festival. Slamdance is considered to be the alternative to Sundance. "The Passing of Time" was rejected by Slamdance. So why the win in one competition and the rejection in the other? If I could bottle the formula for producing a sure fire way to win every festival, I'd hope I'd be rich. Actually, the answer is easy. Its, know your audience or in this case the judges. "The Passing of Time," or TPOT as it is affectionately called, is full of quotations from famous people regarding the future. Its full of predictions regarding life in the year 2000. At some points it probably gets a bit cerebral. A pretty good fit then for the Broadcast Education Association competition. But probably (and it was) a waste of time and money for Slamdance.

As I become more familiar with the festivals, I am learning to recognize what type of programming each festival really wants. Sure many of them say they accept all kinds of programs, but really what do they want? Judges have certain likes, dislikes, loyalties and so on. I truly believe that not only

should you meet the technical requirements for entering your piece, but you should try to find out who the audience for these festivals are. I am entering TPOT in more festivals and will provide a running commentary of these festivals in future issues.

It is disturbing to hear that our membership has fallen again. While I recognize that it seems that falling membership is a trend among clubs and societies, I still think that ours is the best deal for the price.

When you are a member of the American Motion Picture Society:

- you support the oldest continuously held film and video festival in the world,

- you support a film/video festival that reaches out to the low budget/amateur producer.

- you receive 6 issues of "Movie Maker" which contains articles on festivaling, judging, "how-to" production stories, and current festival information,

- you may contribute articles or letters to "Movie Makers."

Film/video production is a growing field. Its even being taught in high schools. There isn't any reason why AMPS shouldn't grow as well. Let me know what you think. I'd love to hear from you.

Matt Jenkins
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this year's American International Film & Video Festival. The story was inspired by the little town of Roswell, New Mexico, where residents believe they spotted aliens at a nearby Air Force Base, and have become the alien capital of the country. In our program, a group of teens try to tease some younger children by staging an alien sighting, but the incident gets blown out of proportion when the mayor and other townspeople decide aliens can be a profitable tourist industry.

Producing this half-hour show was a full year proposition. I wrote the script in January, then got together with the songwriters to review it with them and brainstorm where songs might fit with the flow of the show. While the songwriters were developing the musical side of the program, I was busy lining up locations—making calls and writing letters to get approvals—and finding a musical director and a choreographer for the show. Whenever I drive around Cleveland, I'm always on the lookout for good shooting locations: places that are visually interesting, offer easy access, and where our videotaping won't be too disruptive to normal activities.

For *ALIENS* I selected a park with several bridges that cross a meandering stream for a scene where an alien chases some of the kids. A farm park for a scene between two of the teens, a lovely old village green complete with a gazebo and a Civil War statue for a scene where the townspeople come together and

sing "I Saw an Alien," plus a mall, a high school, a couple of homes, and a lovely old attic. As the songs were completed they were handed over to our music composer to do the synthesized accompaniments. In the spring, I conducted auditions for over 80 elementary and high school students, followed by a call-back audition for the most talented kids. This process took several weeks, but was well worth it because it yielded a very talented cast of 25 that was fun to work with and capable of doing more ambitious things. By the first week of June, rehearsals were in full swing a couple of nights a week, practicing the songs and scenes. I started to videotape scenes that didn't contain songs by the middle of June, saving scenes with songs until later to give the cast more time to rehearse. On the last Sunday in June we recorded the five songs from the show, then played them back in the field while videotaping the songs.

We shot on location on every Saturday from the middle of June until the early part of August, and were very fortunate with the weather. Rain can really wreck havoc with our schedule because the cast and crew all have other obligations, so rescheduling a shoot can be a major undertaking. My crew was composed of high school and college students plus some adults who are interested in the video production process, but it usually takes a few days of production before they can begin to operate cohesively as a unit.

During the last two weeks of

August I logged the 24 tapes we shot, selected the takes that worked best and began to draw a mental picture of how they would all fit together. Then in mid-September I began editing the show a couple nights a week with help from some of the crew members. The video editing process is like putting a giant jigsaw puzzle together, where all the pieces are moving, but you can only see two of them at a time: the directing decisions worked and which one didn't... leaving you with an interesting editing challenge of making a scene work even though your master shot and your close-up don't fit together quite as smoothly as they should.

Inserting the custom post scored theme music and then mixing down the audio for the program were the final pieces of the puzzle. Then we held a "world Premiere" showing for the kids and their parents, and entered it in the American International Film & Video Festival. Spreading the production process over a full year allows me to take on the many tasks in small, manageable chunks. And by working with so many talented people I get re-energized at each stage of the process, getting excited all over again when a memorable new song is played for the first time, when a talented new child auditions, and when I view a video clip from the first shoot that really works. Put together a team of people—young and old—who share your passion for film or video, and try a big production. I think you'll enjoy it!



Thoughts for the New Millennium

TECHNICAL

By Jim Beach



It is hard to imagine what new and wonderful means will be available in the new millennium to make and exhibit what we now call movies or videos.

Everything we now use and take for granted has been invented and developed in the past millennium. It started with flickering black and white silent films and progressed to talkies, color film, black and white television, color television, camcorders the size of a large briefcase and finally at the end the millennium we have digital camcorders you can carry in your shirt pocket.

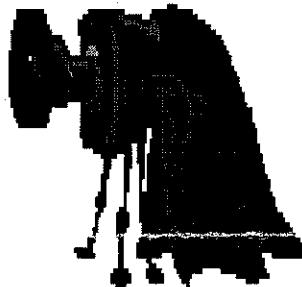
For starters we already have a plan and schedule for progressively introducing digital HDTV (high definition television) throughout our broadcasting services and receivers for our homes. It is already a fact in a few locales. In 5 years it will be commonplace. Flat screens for viewing are already available but are very expensive. The cost will come

down and the quality, already good, will go up and they will be commonplace within a few years. Sony has just announced a new solid state camcorder to be available in February. Instead of tape the digital data is stored on a solid

state card.

The resolution is as high as today's single chip digital camcorders but so far the solid state device holds only 20 minutes of data. I think this concept will grow rapidly in popularity as storage capacity rapidly goes up and price comes down.

CCDs, the imaging device of video cameras, are already being produced with megapixels compared to 200,000 to 400,000 pix-



els common today. Within a few years they will be produced with 6 to 7 megapixels. This will enable video to equal the resolution and latitude of 35mm film. With a few gigabytes of ram and perhaps a Terabyte of hard disk or other solid state storage we will begin to see film being replaced by video for many commercial purposes just as video succeeded film for amateur use.

The rapidly developing romance between television and computers for use in the home will soon result in an all-purpose package for the home. How this will affect amateur movie making is hard to say but it probably will.

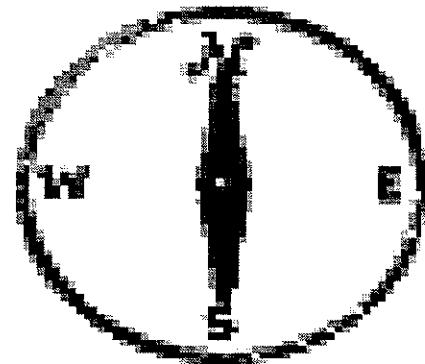
I'm somewhat a visionary but I just cannot visualize the changes that will come about in this field in

the next decade let alone the millennium. Look how rapidly digital recording has come into focus. It was not a factor until the 1990s and now it is available at all price levels amateur to professional.

Odds and Ends -

Having just returned from a Christmas Cruise in the Caribbean, I'll relate a few video experiences.

On a flightseeing excursion over Grand Cayman Island I failed to practice that which I learned on a previous trip. For shots inside the airplane autofocus is probably best since you usually can't take time to focus manually; however, for shots through the windows I think focus to infinity would be best. The reason being, that the windows always have a few spots that the camera will pick up. I forgot and left it on auto focus and did pick up



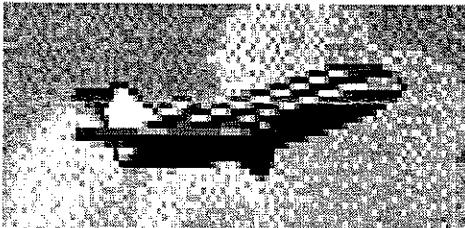
some spots, which tends to exaggerate any camera motion, which is inevitable in a small plane. Maybe it would pick them up even on focus to infinity but I'll never know as once again I forgot what I intended.

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On a sightseeing submarine at Grand Cayman I was disappointed to learn that color is lost rapidly as we go deeper. Reds go first by 20 feet then yellow then green changes to blue and by 100 feet a blue gray is all you or the camera sees. Artificial lighting causes other problems for the viewers so they do not use them in daytime. A nighttime cruise might be more colorful.

On the same trip as we got below 80 feet my lens fogged up. It was just as we were approaching a shipwreck. By the time I had enough sense to unscrew the lens shade and filter we had passed the wreck. Apparently the



fog was on the filter as it was fine after I took it off. The atmosphere was comfortable but apparently a bit too humid or maybe a slight pressure change caused it.

On an excursion to the Mayan archaeological site of Tulum, on the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, I carried my small Sony tripod. The Mexican government charges 10 Pesos (\$4.00) for using a camcorder. I knew this in advance and all was well. I had taken most of the shots I wanted with the tripod when a guard asked me not to use it. It is against the rules as it impedes traffic around the sites. I know that is often a rule at museums and other high traffic tourist areas here but was a bit surprised in Mexico. Oh well I got

most of what I wanted and the stabilizer is fine except for long tele-shots.

One other lesson learned that I forgot was a plastic bag to cover the camcorder in case of rain. At Key West I realized I didn't have a Ziploc with me just as a rainsquall hit. Fortunately I got on a closed trolley in time and by the time I got off the rain was over.

I didn't take much video aboard ship, as it was a sister ship to the one we were on in May and I covered that pretty thoroughly in a movie I called "Exploring The Ship."

It's... A Snappy!

Matt Jenkins

Wow, do I love the Snappy or what?

The story goes that some of the folks that invented the Video Toaster left and formed their own company. And one of their first products was the Snappy Video Snapshot or Snappy.

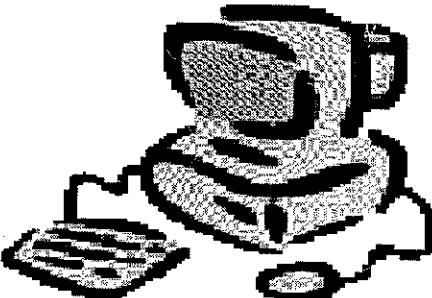
Just what does the Snappy do? The Snappy will capture still frames from your VCR or camcorder and save them in a variety of formats on your P.C.

The makers of Snappy, Play Incorporated, have provided easy to follow and often humorous instructions for the installation and use of the Snappy. They have made the Snappy just about fool proof to use.

The Snappy actually consists of a what is called a Snappy Hardware Module which comes loaded with a battery, and software. The hardware module has RCA connectors on one side and a connector for your computer's parallel port. Take a RCA video cable, plug one end into your VCR's line out put and plug the other into the "video in" on the Snappy and then plug the Snappy into your parallel port. Its that easy to install. The software is just as easy to install and run.

Snappy's makers recommend using a computer with a 386 or better microprocessor, Windows 95 or higher, mouse, minimum VGA 640 X 480 X 16 color display (16 or 24 bit display card recommended,) four Megabites of RAM, a hard drive with at least four megabites of free space, an unused parallel port and of course a VCR or video camera.

In the version I have, you can only preview the video you want to capture as a still frame in black and white. I understand



that in newer version this preview is in color.

Simply play the video or aim the

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Make Your Videos "Look" More Professional

Matt Jenkins

Ihe title of this article is a little misleading. I'm not talking about making the production look more professional, I'm referring to creating a professionally looking videotape boxes and labels.

Sure we produce small budget productions, but we can still produce quality boxes and labels in which to package our productions.

Let's start with the box. I just happen to be in my local Block-Buster video rental store and noticed they were selling the high quality plastic video covers that open up. They have a clear plastic sleeve on them that a printed cover can be slid into. The cost was .25 cents for one for five for a dollar. A great buy in my mind! I quickly snapped up fifty and already I have to go back for more.

Now, using my Snappy (a glowing review is elsewhere in this issue) or any kind of video capture program, I grab some critical pictures from my latest epic and store them in my computer.

You can easily create the paper cover to slip inside the plastic box sleeve using any recent version of such programs as Corel Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Publisher, Corel Draw.... The trick is to make sure everything lines up when you cut the paper to fit in the box sleeve. Put your titles in large bold letters, say something about yourself and of course show those critical pictures from your movie!

Labels- videotapes have face and spine labels. I use Microsoft Publisher which has a template to create video tape labels already. However, I have formatted other programs quite easily to create the labels. Microsoft Publisher



says to use Avery labels which costs about \$50 per box of three hundred. Look on-line or through those flyers that we all toss away to see if the face and spine labels can be found cheaper.

Be sure to use the same "design" you used on your cover, in your labels. That includes letter type and pictures. If possible, even try to match the letter type you used in the graphics in your program. This insures continuity for the product.

With a little fuss, in no time at all you will have matching boxes and labels, making your production stand out.

Basic Fundamentals

George Cushman

No. 6 - May 1992

If we asked ten different movie makers what the perfect motion picture would be, we'd probably get ten different answers. And if we asked ten different judges the same question the result would no doubt be identical.

This is regrettable, for judges, of all people, should have an almost unanimous definition.

Well, now, what would the perfect motion picture be?

Probably the best approach to a true answer can be found in Andrew Buchanan's book, "Film and the Future." Buchanan, a veteran motion picture student, scholar, writer, teacher, and producer, wrote an oft-quoted description of what the perfect motion picture should be, and we would do well to review it here. In his exact words, Buchanan wrote:

"Discussing movie making with a student who possessed the right equipment and who was anxious and eager to begin, I advised him first to regard his camera and all its fascinating gadgets as of quite secondary importance, and I warned him never for one moment to permit his equipment to become his master, for once equipment dominates the owner and gov-

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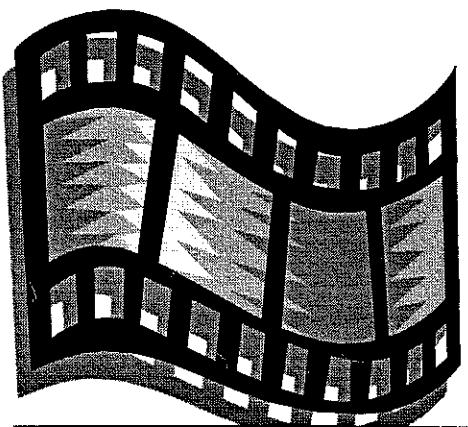
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camera at what ever you want to "grab" and click on the appropriate button. Wait a moment, then you can see the image on the screen. Don't like the image? Simply delete and start over. There are controls which allow you to control brightness.

You can save the images to a variety of formats so you can use the images in other programs.

I heard that the price ranges from \$90 to \$120 for the Snappy.

It's a great tool to use for capturing pictures from your epic masterpieces to use on web pages, in posters, for videotape covers and all sorts of materials to help promote your work!



(Continued from Page 6)

erns production methods, the result lacks human creativity.

Next I told him that the first and last essential in moving pictures is movement, not just action and motion in a scene, but movement of story throughout the picture. Strangely enough, thousands overlook this basic fact, and many producers make ambitious and costly films which do not move at all.

The function of a motion picture is to tell its story in terms of moving images, and not to rely upon human speech to explain the action.

The motion picture is an independent medium, unrelated to the stage or literature, demanding a special techniques. The test of a true motion picture is the smoothness of its pictorial movement, and the clarity of its story explained by moving images.

I told the student his camera should not be used to provide a display of technical magic, explaining that an audience should be unconscious of the work of the camera, its attention undistracted from the story being nar-

rated by the moving images. Any one can soon learn how to operate a camera, but there is a fundamental difference between taking pictures and making pictures.

The above is probably as good a description of a perfect motion picture as could be offered. Unfortunately not enough judges look for these primary factors when evaluating festival fare.

Also, very few picture makers even try to adhere to these fundamentals when writing and planning their film and video.

Of course no production can follow all of these facets, so a good judge can, and should, consider all those the maker uses, and how effectively he has used them.

Buchanan's definition is mostly on form, but the picture must also have meaning, move well, and be acceptable and understandable to the audience.

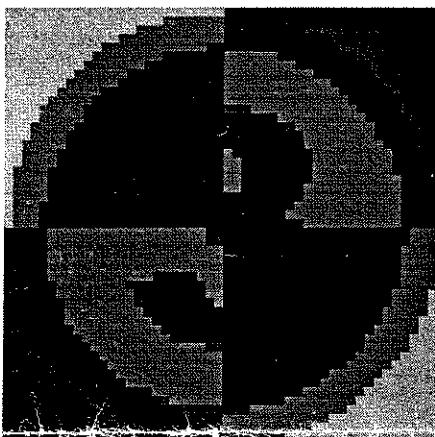
Combining good form and content results in a prize winning motion picture. When the maker does his part, the judge is duty bound to apply these basic principles of good motion picture making when casting his vote. To do anything less is grossly unfair to the contestant.

Close Date	Festival Name & Address for forms	Open to:	Sub-ject	For-mats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
3-16-2000	5th Mississippi Valley Int'l Video Festival % Joan Winslow, 822 Limoge Dr., Manchester, MO 63021-6605	A	G	M- NTSC	20 MIN	\$9	Medals V	4-5-00 St Louis, MO
4-15-2000	Cotswold Int'l Film&Video Festival C.I.F.V.F., 37, Canberra, Stonehouse Glocestershire, GL10 2PR England e-mail leepres@anglovideogxy.demon.co.uk	ABG	G	MN on PAL or VHS on NTSC	20 MIN	Y	T UV	Stroud, Glocester- shire, England
N/A Not Announced or Not Available		Please include a self addressed stamped envelope with your entry request						
A Non Commercial	D Independant	G Open	K Other L 3/4 "	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8	Q Invitatatl R Regional S Exceptions	T Cash U Trophies V Certificate	W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies	
B College Student	E Commercial	H S8	M VHS J 16mm					

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Please consider this to be a sample page. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Yes it is an odd address but again this is a sample page.



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Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 9.00

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